



## **Report 1: Wisconsin Early Child Care Study Findings on the Validity of YoungStar Rating for Observed Classroom Quality**

### **Executive Summary**

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**July 2015**

Wisconsin's child care quality rating and improvement system, YoungStar, was created to improve the quality of child care through two strategies: increasing parents' knowledge about the quality of early care and education providers and supporting providers' efforts to deliver high quality care. The YoungStar rating system assigns participating child care providers a star level from 1 to 5 based on objective indicators of quality in four domains: education and professional training, curriculum and learning environment, business and professional practices, and child health and well-being. YoungStar is administered by Wisconsin's Department of Children and Families, who has contracted the operation of the program's regional offices, technical assistance, and rating implementation to a consortium of three organizations (Celebrate Children's Foundation, Supporting Families Together, and Wisconsin Early Childhood Association).

In Wisconsin, the process of criterion indicator development and implementation was informed by other states' efforts and input from both experts and practitioners. An important goal for the Department of Children and Families has been to use empirical evidence to investigate whether the rating scale and the rating process work as intended to differentiate programs with respect to classroom quality and participating children's school readiness gains. The Wisconsin Early Child Care Study (WECCS) was undertaken to provide such an examination of the validity of YoungStar's rating scale. The study was designed both to examine whether the rating scale is able to differentiate programs according to their levels of independently observed quality and whether children who attend more highly rated programs gain more in terms of school readiness over the course of a school year than children attending programs rated at lower levels. This Executive Summary describes the findings



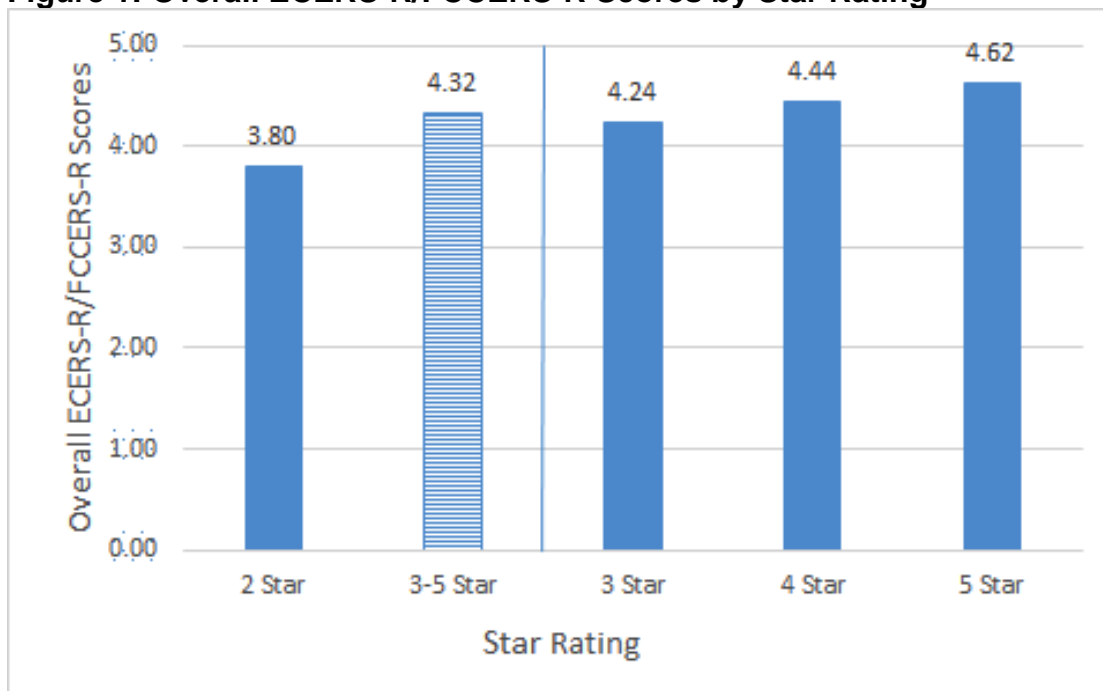
from the first research report that investigates whether YoungStar rating predicts independently observed classroom quality. A second report will describe the validity of the YoungStar rating system with respect to children's early learning and school readiness outcomes.

### Study Design

WECCS staff recruited a sample of family and group child care providers participating in the YoungStar program in May of 2013 from the Northeast and Milwaukee YoungStar regions. Sampling was designed to facilitate comparisons across quality levels and ensure representation across communities. Programs were asked to participate in the study if they met basic eligibility requirements related to the age of children served and languages spoken. If the program administrator agreed to participate and at least four children between ages 3 and 5 had completed study parental consent forms, the program was considered enrolled in the study. Reflecting the distribution of programs in the state, most programs in this study were in the 2 Star and 3 Star rating categories.

In the winter of 2013-2014, study field staff were trained to observe classroom quality using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised and the Family Child Care Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R and FCCERS-R, jointly referred to as the Environment Rating Scale, ERS). The study field staff met high standards for reliability of their ratings compared with master coders. Of the 157 sites enrolled in the study, 155 programs were part of the observational ratings, with valid observations of 239 classrooms and family providers being completed by April of 2014.

**Figure 1: Overall ECERS-R/FCCERS-R Scores by Star Rating**



Note: Significant difference in the overall ERS scores comparing high-quality programs (3 Star or above) to low-quality programs (2 Star or lower).

## Findings and Discussion

Results from analyses of the data provide answers to two important questions about the validity of the YoungStar rating scale. First, the YoungStar star rating level does differentiate among programs of varying observed quality (Figure 1). In particular,



programs rated as 2 Star had scores on the global ERS that were about 0.5 points lower than programs rated at 3 Star or above. These differences were statistically significant and meaningful, representing a fairly large proportion of the variation in score ratings (about half of a standard deviation). Yet, it is important to note that differences represent improvement within the range of minimal (ERS=3) to good (ERS=5) quality care. The study was not designed to test for

differences in observed quality between programs at the higher end of the rating scale.

The second validation question answered by this study was whether the rating points that serve as the basis for the star level categorization also predicted a program's observed classroom quality. As expected, the total amount of rating points within each domain was highly correlated with points in other domains, and thus, each domain measures related aspects of program quality. Most importantly, the total number of points in each of the four rating domains (Education and Training, Learning Environment and Curriculum, Business and Professional Practices, and Child Health and Wellbeing) predicted observed classroom quality. With respect to total rating points, the difference in points between a 2 Star program (8.6 average points) and 4 Star program (28.8 average points) predicts a 1.2 point difference in ERS ratings, which translates into quite a substantial effect, given the amount of observed variation across programs (over a standard deviation).

For more details about the study design and findings related to the analysis of observational quality ratings, see the WECCS first full final report. The second report containing the analysis of early learning and school readiness outcomes will be issued by December 31, 2015.